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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a dropout prevention, residential summer program on university campuses in Arkansas. The Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) progam began in 1988 at Henderson State University and by 1990 five Arkansas universities hosted programs. Funds for the program are provided through state agencies, the universities, vocational funds, and participating service delivery areas. The YOU program gives 14- and 15-year-old students the opportunity to master basic skills in language arts, mathematics, and reading as well as work experience during their 60-day residential program. Students can receive high school elective credit for their summer classes, which count toward graduation. Students also have the opportunity to earn approximately $600.00 to $700.00 for on-campus employment. Students are given a weekly allowance, and the rest of the money is put into a safekeeping account. Students receive medical and dental examinations and medical insurance for the summer. Henderson State University is tracking the pilot group of YOU students for 3 years. Results from the first and second year follow-up show that grade point average and attendance did not improve; however, students' self-esteem and positive attitudes improved during the program and remained stable after a 2-year lapse. Of the 43 pilot students, 3 have completed high school, 2 are in college, and only 6 have left school. (KS)

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Keeping Our Students in School: An Alternative Approach for At-Risk Students

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Keeping Our Students in School: An Alternative Approach for At-risk Students

Research has suggested that students who do not finish high school are often at risk of not being able to thrive as productive citizens. Persons who do not finish high school are heavily represented in our prisons and on our welfare rolls (Gabriel and Anderson, 1987). The economic potential for this group as a whole is greatly diminished.

A high school diploma is often an entry level requirement for many employment opportunities. Graduation is a stepping stone for any advanced educational opportunities such as community or junior college, four-year colleges and universities, as well as technical or vocational schools. Most job advancement is tied to educational minimums. A person might land a manual labor job without a high school degree, but will be hindered in advancement beyond that low level job. Usually this is often at a wage which is barely livable.

Encouraging students to stay in school is a preventative measure. This is a much more difficult task than it seems on the surface. One must get to the heart of the problem and help alleviate the reasons why students drop out.

In response to surveys given to students who have dropped out of school, the main reasons for leaving school are identified: 1. lack of interest in school because it means nothing to them, 2. a need to earn money, 3. pregnancy, and 4. getting married (Beekman, 1988).

This first reason demands our greatest attention. If we can show students why finishing school is important, as well as encouraging them to buy into the value of education, much of the drop-out picture will change.

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Arkansas is attempting a program which addresses how the student perceives education. This program is a replication and adoption of a program originated in Texas, called Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.). In June of 1988, Arkansas implemented its first summer residential Y.O.U. program for high school students who have been designated as at-risk for dropping out of school. The Y.O.U. participants were identified by their school counselors as "at-risk" for dropping out, using factors such as low family income, families who have not completed high school, families who have not placed a huge value in education, lack of interest in school, mobility, etc, (Gabriel & Anderson, 1987; Steinmiller & Steinmiller, 1990).

The first efforts of Henderson State University and the Arkansas Department of Education marked the beginning of the Youth Opportunities Unlimited Program in Arkansas. In 1989, Henderson hosted a second program, with the addition of three more programs at other Arkansas universities: Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Southern Arkansas University in Magnolia, and University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. In 1990, a fifth program was included. This program was housed at the College of the Ozarks in Clarksville, Arkansas.

The Y.O.U. Program is dependent upon the commitment and resources of state agencies as well as from many community members. The Department of Human Services provides resources to offset the cost of food for the participants. Each host university provides office space, office utilities, and janitorial services as in-kind services. Each university also provides academic scholarships to Y.O.U. graduates. All three educational agencies (general, vocational, and higher education) have worked together to assist these students in receiving this opportunity. The Vocational Technical Division through 8% funds have provided curriculum and testing materials as well as technical assistance by housing the state Y.O.U. Supervisor. Carl Perkins Vocational Funds have been utilized to provide for the three year follow-up and research component. Participating service delivery areas (SDAs) are responsible for providing funding for selected Y.O.U. students. The cost for each student is approximately $3,150 (Y.O.U. Fact Sheet, June 1989).

As Arkansas is a very rural state, the approach of using several colleges and universities to serve different areas of the state allowed more students access to the program.

Since the program is residential, students from the most remote areas of Arkansas can easily participate. The Y.O.U. program includes room board and transportation expenses, so students without a strong economic base are able to attend and gain from this experience.

Each Arkansas Y.O.U. program gives fourteen and fifteen year-old students across the state the opportunity to master basic skills in language arts, mathematics, and reading as well as work experience during their "intensive" sixty-day residential program on the universities' campuses, (Henderson State University Press Release, June 14, 1988).

The Y.O.U. Program is an outstanding program in the state of Arkansas because it focuses on the "total child". Y.O.U. attempts to address every child's needs. For example:

> Students from all across the state live on a college campus for 60 days in the summer. This provides a unique opportunity for students from various backgrounds to experience (1) life on a college campus, (2) many varied cultures, (3) life in a positive environment, (4) possible job opportunities for the future, and (5) what can be theirs if they finish high school.
>
> Each program hires certified teachers which utilizes an Arkansas approved curriculum. This allows the Y.O.U. students the opportunity to receive high school elective credit in language arts, reading, mathematics, and P.E. These credits can apply to graduation. Students are given the opportunity to receive instruction specifically designed to meet their needs. The average teacher/pupil ratio is 1:6.
>
> The Y.O.U. students are provided the opportunity to earn approximately $600.00 to $700.00 for on-campus employment. Although students earn almost $90.00 a week, most Y.O.U. participants are given an allowance every Friday as a stipend. The remainder of the money is put into safekeeping. The Y.O.U. safekeeping account allows for students to learn how to budget their money as well as understand the value of saving

money. At the end of the program, students are allowed to spend some of the savings to purchase necessities such as school clothes for the fall. The remainder is sent to him/her in a check.

The medical component of this program is outstanding. Every Y.O.U. student is provided with medical and dental examinations as well as with medical insurance for the entire summer. For many of our students, this is the very first opportunity they have had to seek medical attention. In addition to medical and dental examinations, most students are given a TB test, vision examination, and hearing examination. Many students received glasses through the Y.O.U. program.

Midway through the summer, the Y.O.U. program hosts a parents' weekend. The Program provides for transportation, food, and lodging for two people per family. While on campus, the parents are asked to attend a series of seminars about obtaining financial assistance for college, how to help your child in school, and the importance of a good education. The weekend finale is a banquet with a talent show provided by the students.

Through the Y.O.U. Program, students are also given the opportunity to visit exciting places in the state of Arkansas as well as surrounding states. For many, this is their first travel adventure. As a special treat, the students were treated to a special day at the Governor's Mansion (Y.O.U. Fact Sheet, 1989).

Henderson State University has the responsibility to conduct the follow-up research for the Youth Opportunities Programs in Arkansas. Henderson is tracking the pilot group of Y.O.U. students for three years. With the cooperation of key persons at the other universities and colleges, Henderson is also gathering data on the four 1989 programs, and the five 1990 programs. Final results for the pilot group should be available by October of 1991.

The follow-up endeavors are intended to help determine the success of the Arkansas Y.O.U. program. Data collection includes information related to grades, attendance, self-esteem, and attitudes. The most important variable, though, will be staying in school and graduating.

This paper reflects the 1990 data collection endeavors for the 1988 pilot group. In subsequent papers, we will share our data reports as we progress through our study.

The 1988 pilot group started the program with fifty-two students. Forty-four students finished the 8 week program. This is an 84 percent completion rate. During the first year of follow-up, one student died in a fire; thus forty-three students are included in the pilot follow-up. At the end of the first year follow-up, four students moved out of state. Even though they have left Arkansas, we are maintaining contact with these students. Also, only two students had left school. One of the students left tc get married, but actually intends to return or get her G.E.D. The other was expelled because of absences, but re-enrolled during the 1989-90 school year.

At the end of the second year, two students are out of the state (two moved back from last year). Two students have already graduated and are attending a university, one other has received his G.E.D. There are six students who have been reported as having left school.

The grades recorded for both the first and second year follow-up of the pilot group showed little change. The average grades earned for the pilot students prior to the Y.O.U. summer program (1988) was 2.19. The average grades of the first year after Y.O.U. (1989) was 1.89 and for the second year after was 2.10.

The attendance for the first year follow-up also showed little change. The average number of absences for the pilot students prior to the Y.O.U. (1988) was 3.1 days. The average number of absences for the Y.O.U. students during the first year after the Y.O.U. program (1989) was 3.17, and during the second year after Y.O.U. was 3.10.

We measured the students' self-esteem using the Jr.-Sr. HSPQ Test Profile. We pre-tested the students during the first week of the Y.O.U. program and then post-tested them during the last week. The information derived from the self-esteem inventory included factors such as coolness or warmth,

concrete or abstract thinking, emotional stability, excitability, dominance or submission, variation in mood, conforming attitude, shy or boldness, tenderness or tough mindedness, vigorous or withdrawn, self assured or apprehensive, self sufficient, self discipline, and relaxed or tensed. The results of the pre/post test demonstrated that the students' scores changed from extremes in the above areas to a more normal rating. This demonstrated more "normal" self-esteem pattern for the group as a whole. This was also reflected in the individual changes.

The HSPQ inventory was again administered in the spring of 1990. Twenty-five of the forty-three pilot students attended a reunion retreat. The results of the HSPQ inventory maintained the normal measures established in the original post-test. Thus the positive self-esteem effects of the Y.O.U. program continued through the second year.

Another area we measured is the attitude of the students. Although this can be very subjective in nature, one cannot disregard the importance of students views of themselves and their experiences. When students made statements such as "I know I'm smarter than I used to be" or "I study better than before" one can assume a positive attitude change has occurred.

In the spring of each year, we interview each student to see what student attitudes prevail. In both the spring of 1989 and of 1990, the students continued to make very positive statements.

The results from the first and second year follow-up look promising. Although the grade point and attendance did not improve significantly, they did not drop significantly either, but they remained stable. The self esteem results were very positive. Students scores were in the extreme range in the pre-test and settled into the normal range on the post-test. These scores remained stable after a two year lapse. The positive attitudes reflected by the students during their exit interviews continued to remain so two years later. But most promising is the fact that three students have already completed high school with two in college. Also, of the forty-three pilot students, only six have left school. As of the spring of 1991, the pilot group has an 84% stay in rate. So far, even with a very "at-risk" population, we are favoring well in the drop-out statistics.

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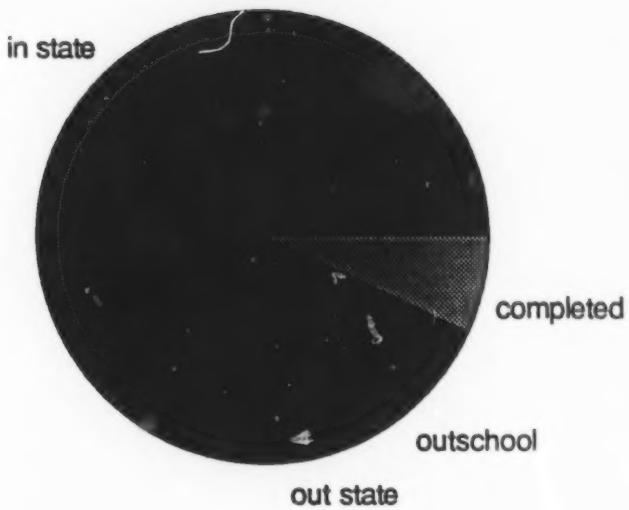
Youth Opportunities Unlimited
1988 Pilot Program
Ratio of Students in and out of School



43 students

32 students in school in state * 2 in school out of state
3 completed high school/GED * 6 out of school